

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Regions: 4 & 5

Hunting Districts: Major changes in HDs 411, 511, 530 (Snowy Mountains), 540 & 580 (East Crazy and South Little Belt Mountains) and minor changes making the 004-00 and 005-00 B Licenses OTC which affects all R4 HDs except HDs 410 & 455 and all R5 HDs.

Year: 2019

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history.

FWP proposes to change season types and licenses in hunting districts 411, 511, 530, 540 and 580, all which have performance-based shoulder seasons that have failed to meet harvest criteria after two years and are unlikely to meet those criteria in a third year, and to make the 004-00 and 005-00 B Licenses over-the-counter instead of limited draw. The purpose is to increase harvest of elk, especially antlerless elk, by focusing more antlerless harvest during the general firearms season by changing these HDs to antlerless-only harvest during the last three weeks of the general season and by increasing availability of B Licenses. In general, this proposal:

- Maintains current shoulder seasons because of the substantial antlerless harvest that occurs. In the last two years 32% of adult cow harvest totaling 590 cows in these 5 HDs was during shoulder seasons (Table 1).
- Maintains the current archery season.
- Changes the general rifle season to first 2 weeks either-sex or spike/antlerless as the case may be and the last 3 weeks to antlerless-only.
- Converts the limited-draw regional 004-00 and 005-00 B licenses to over-the-counter to allow additional opportunity if/when hunters desire.
- Retains special either-sex opportunity permits such as the 900-20, 411-20, 580-21 and 580-22 through the entire archery and general seasons.

Specifics of this proposal are found in Table 2.

Shoulder seasons were instituted in these 5 HDs and 38 others in 2016 and were originally meant to be evaluated against specific harvest criteria with three years of harvest data. However, it is clear that the 5 HDs identified here will not meet them even with an additional year of harvest. The 5 HDs proposed for change were chosen from among the 43 HDs with shoulder seasons because they are the most egregiously over-objective and fell short by 400 or more of the needed adult cow harvest for 2016 and 2017 combined (Table 1).

This proposal comes outside of the regular biennial cycle but is necessitated by FWP's and the Commission's interest in managing elk to population objective.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this change is to achieve more elk harvest, particularly of antlerless elk, and move populations toward objective in these five hunting districts.

Table 1. Montana 2016 and 2017 combined Shoulder Season Performance Criteria Evaluation. Green cell = meets criteria, orange = does not meet criteria. Hunting districts proposed for seasons and license changes for 2019 are highlighted in yellow.

2016 + 2017 Harvest Criteria - Harvest that is needed and harvest that was realized											
Hunting District(s)	Archery and General Seasons				All Seasons Combined (Archery+General+Shoulder)				For Adult Cows		
	Adult Cows		Adult Bulls		Adult Cows		Cows + Bulls + Calves		Number short	% of Harv Obj Realized	# cows taken in shoulder seasons
	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized			
101	NA		NA		NA		NA				
109/110	NA		NA		NA		NA				
210/211	207	285	132	363	406	536	664	925			
212	141	102	93	301	276	192	459	517	-84	70%	90
213	56	121	41	133	110	145	191	295			
215	291	442	194	630	520	927	950	1597			
217	125	109	84	113	246	399	410	535			
290/298	72	177	48	123	169	286	236	433			
291	132	108	87	185	258	304	429	502			
292	NA		NA		NA		NA				
312	183	378	122	454	359	571	598	1062			
390	274	241	183	289	537	399	895	726	-138	74%	158
393	470	467	313	508	921	743	1535	1283	-178	81%	276
411/511/530	704	608	503	568	1380	943	2367	1570	-437	68%	335
412	92	164	61	125	181	256	301	404			
421/423	69	119	46	179	136	187	227	380			
422	173	141	116	146	340	292	567	445	-48	86%	151
445/455	471	409	314	340	923	550	1538	919	-373	60%	141
446	257	291	171	436	504	543	840	1020			
449/452	165	222	110	304	324	346	540	698			
451	83	42	55	72	162	94	270	177	-68	58%	52
502/510W	22	36	15	30	44	48	74	80			
520NW	204	124	137	180	400	208	668	399	-192	52%	84
540	391	241	260	250	767	329	1277	609	-438	43%	88
560N	216	211	144	284	424	337	707	650	-87	79%	126
570	80	82	53	102	156	132	260	243	-24	85%	50
575	147	148	99	85	288	194	482	291	-94	67%	46
580	554	383	369	541	1086	550	1810	1109	-536	51%	167
590N	406	453	270	491	796	624	1326	1144	-172	78%	171
620/621/622	466	493	311	462	914	569	1524	1055	-345	62%	76
630/631/632	87	106	57	119	170	144	282	268	-26	85%	38
680/690	102	112	68	78	200	137	334	224	-63	69%	25

Table 2. Current 2018 Hunting seasons and licenses and proposals for 2019 (in red) in five over-objective HDs with shoulder seasons.

		Season				
	HD	Early Shoulder Antlerless-only	Archery Season	Between Shoulder Antlerless-only	General Rifle Season	Late Shoulder Antlerless-only
Current	411	Gen Lic 4800 004-00 B 400 411-00 B	Gen Lic Ant- only 4800 004-00 B 400 411-00 B 200 411-20 ES Permits 3700 900-20 ES Permits	Gen Lic 4800 004-00 B 400 411-00 B	Gen Lic Ant- only 4800 004-00 B 400 411-00 B 200 411-20 ES Permits	Gen Lic 4800 004-00 B 400 411-00 B
	511, 530	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B 400 411-00 B	Gen Lic Spk or Ant- 1500 005-00 B 400 411-00 B 200 411-20 ES Permits 3700 900-20 ES Permits	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B 400 411-00 B	Gen Lic Spk or Ant- 1500 005-00 B 400 411-00 B 200 411-20 ES Permits	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B 400 411-00 B
2019 Proposal	411, 511, 530	Gen Lic	Gen Lic Spk or Antlerless	Gen Lic	Gen Lic 2 wk spk or Antlerless & 3 wk Antlerless-only	Gen Lic
		OTC Unlim 004-00 B & 005-00 B Licenses good in all 3 HDs	900-20 & 411-20 ES Permits good entire season OTC Unlim 004-00 & 005-00 B	OTC Unlim 004-00 B & 005-00 B Licenses good in all 3 HDs	411-20 ES Permits good entire season OTC Unlim 004-00 & 005-00 B	OTC Unlim 004-00 B & 005-00 B Licenses good in all 3 HDs
		400 411-00 B	400 411-00 B	400 411-00 B	400 411-00 B	400 411-00 B
Current	540	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B	Gen Lic BTB or Ant- 1500 005-00 B 100 540-00 B	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B	Gen Lic BTB or Ant- 1500 005-00 B 100 540-00 B	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B
2019 Proposal	540	Gen Lic	Gen Lic spk or Antlerless	Gen Lic	Gen Lic 2 wk spk or Antlerless & 3 wk Antlerless-only	Gen Lic
		OTC Unlim 005-00 B	OTC Unlim 005-00 B & 100 540-00 B	OTC Unlim 005-00 B	OTC Unlim 005-00 B & 100 540-00 B	OTC Unlim 005-00 B

Continued.

Table 2 (concluded). Current 2018 Hunting seasons and licenses and proposals for 2019 (in red) in five over-objective HDs with shoulder seasons.

		Season				
	HD	Early Shoulder Antlerless-only	Archery Season	Between Shoulder Antlerless-only	General Rifle Season	Late Shoulder Antlerless-only
Current	580	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B	Gen Lic ES or Spk/Ant- 1500 005-00 B 100 580-00 B 3700 900-20 ES Permits 65 580-21/22 Permits	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B	Gen Lic ES or Spk/Ant- 1500 005-00 B 100 580-00 B 65 580-21/22 Permits	Gen Lic 1500 005-00 B
2019 Proposal	580	Gen Lic OTC Unlim 005-00 B	Gen Lic ES or spk/antlerless 900-20, 580-21/22 Permits good all season OTC Unlim 005-00 B 100 580-00 B	Gen Lic OTC Unlim 005-00 B	Gen Lic 2 wk ES or spk/antlerless & 3 wk antlerless-only 580-21/22 ES Permits good all season OTC Unlim 005-00 B 100 580-00 B	Gen Lic OTC Unlim 005-00 B

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

Success would be met if elk harvest meets or exceeds recruitment as outlined in the harvest criteria contained in the *Final Elk Season Guidelines: Flexible season structure with performance-based shoulder seasons* adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission 10/08/2015.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives?

Each of the hunting districts or group of districts being considered in this proposal for season structure changes is significantly over population objective by anywhere from three to nine times (Table 3).

Table 3. Elk population status in five over-population hunting districts considered for hunting season structure changes for 2019.

Hunting District(s)	Population Objective	2018 Population Count	Number Over Objective	Percent Over Objective
411/511/530	800	7,342	6,542	918%
540	600	1,841	1,241	307%
580	975	4,821	3,846	494%

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change.

Hunter access has been a perennial issue in these HDs and is a major reason for poor harvest and consequent over-objective populations.

Weather, particularly snow, can have a huge impact on elk harvest and provisions for its consideration are written into the Elk Season Guidelines as follows:

If harvest criteria have not been met due to clear and widely accepted extenuating circumstances (e.g., weather, forest fire, etc.), the shoulder season may be continued, as long as access to elk during the general season is not considered to be the main reason harvest criteria are not being met. If lack of access during the general season is the main reason for not meeting harvest criteria, then the hunting district(s) or a portion of the hunting district may, at the Commission's discretion, shift to antlerless only.

The 2016 season was a notably poor season for elk harvest because weather during the general season was unusually mild while during the late shoulder season it was too snowy for hunters to get around. However, even if the weather had been good for elk hunting, it is unlikely that there would have been sufficient harvest to meet harvest criteria because of the overall poor access to elk in these HDs.

This proposal will increase both resident and non-resident opportunity by making the 004-00 and 005-00 B Licenses over-the-counter rather than a drawing.

This proposal will no doubt lead to some hunter redistribution because of the decreased opportunity to harvest mature bulls during the general rifle season.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal has been vetted internally with FWP staff and early concepts were presented to commissioners Vermillion and Colton but has not had any public exposure.

Submitted by: John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief

Date: November 19, 2018

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: